

INVITATION TO KNOW THE PEACE OF CHRIST ~ Take a slow, deep breath. In this and every time of worship, we are invited to mature in our faith as we receive the peace of Christ. Every time we inhale, we are invited to receive the Spirit of the Living God. The breath/Spirit within us connects the divine with the human in life-enhancing ways. Every time we exhale, we are encouraged to offer a witness to others about how Christ transforms our lives. Receive, embody, and share the peace of Christ this day. Our breathing creates receptive and relational space where God's Spirit can reveal what is deep within waiting to find tangible expression. It is in this space where Christ, as fountain of generous and sending love, overwhelms us with glimpses of what could be. All this is from God. We simply help open the relational space for the Spirit to do its transformative work. Breathe. Peace. Breathe. Peace.

Luke 1:26-38 (adapted from *The Voice* translation):

Six months later in Nazareth, a city in the rural province of Galilee, the heavenly messenger Gabriel made another appearance. This time the messenger was sent by God to meet with a virgin named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David himself. The messenger entered her home.

“Greetings! You are favored, and the Lord is with you! Among all women on the earth, you have been blessed.”

The heavenly messenger's words baffled Mary, and she wondered what type of greeting this was. He continued, *“Mary, don't be afraid. You have found favor with God. Listen, you are going to become pregnant. You will have a son, and you must name Him ‘Savior,’ or Jesus. Jesus will become the greatest among humanity. He will be known as the Son of the Highest God. God will give him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will reign over the covenant family of Jacob forever.”*

Mary questioned, saying, “But I have never been with a man. How can this be possible?”

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Most High will overshadow you. That's why this holy child will be known, as not just your son, but also as the Son of God. It sounds impossible, but listen – you know your relative Elizabeth has been unable to bear children and is now far too old to be a mother. Yet she has become pregnant, as God willed it. Yes, in three months, she will have a son. So the impossible is possible with God.

Speaking from her heart, Mary responded, “Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be done to me.” And the heavenly messenger was gone.

Nothing is Impossible: More Peace

Well, this is the second Sunday in Advent, and the second Sunday in a row that we have witnessed the angel Gabriel bringing a life-altering message from God. Zacharias, you might remember, doubted the message from God, and thus was left speechless until the prophecy had been fulfilled. Mary, upon hearing the greeting of the heavenly messenger, was, according to biblical translators, perplexed, troubled, baffled, confused thoroughly shaken, deeply disturbed! But, in pure angelic form, Gabriel reminds Mary, *“Do not be afraid!”*

You have found favor with God. The power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you. You will give birth to the Savior.” Mary asks, “How can this be?” The angel/messenger said to her, “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

The call of God is to an ordinary woman. It is the call to do something extraordinary. *Nothing will be impossible with God.*

There is a wonderful story about a man who was home with the children one afternoon while his wife went out Christmas shopping. He was reclining on the couch, half sleeping, half watching a football game, when the kids came bounding into the room. “Dad, we have a play to put on? Do you want to see it?” He really didn't want to, but he knew he **needed** to. So he sat up, came out of his slumber, and became a one-person audience.

His four children, ages four, six, eight, and ten years old, were the actors: Mary, Joseph, an angel, and the wise men. Joseph came in with a mop handle. Mary came in with a pillow under her pajamas; another child was an angel, flapping her arms as wings. Finally the last child, the eight year old, came out, with all of the jewelry on that she could find in the house, her arms filled with three presents. “I am all three wise men,” she said. “I bring three precious gifts: gold, circumstance, and mud.”ⁱ

The father didn't laugh. The father didn't correct the wise one. Rather, he reflected on the word that somehow got to the heart of the Christmas story: God loves us for who we are: our gold--where we are at our best; our circumstances--where we are right now; even our mud--where we are when we are most human. God chose an ordinary human being--Mary--to be the vessel through which the Son of God would be born. What is impossible for us is possible with God. God can take our gold, our circumstance, our mud, and do something glorious with them.

This is what the heavenly messenger shared: the disruptive call of God, for Mary, and, who knows, perhaps for you and me.ⁱⁱ

While God's call may disrupt our “circumstance,” and even call alarming attention to our “mud,” it is usually a call that can transform our chaos into inner peace...that peace which passes all understanding. The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be the Prince of Peace, and yet still today, so many believers are stuck in the mud of their circumstance, with no gold, or peace, in sight. All too often, the mud and chaos are of our own making or choosing. We spend much time wishing our circumstances were not the way they actually are. We get stuck in the mud of being perplexed, troubled, baffled, confused, shaken and disturbed. Our ability to creatively

see how God might be working **within** our current situation is diminished by all of the energy we spend on denial or passively waiting for things to change for us.

Peace comes when we accept *what is* and we are able to use our energy to live into the *what's next*. Speaking from her heart, Mary responded, "Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be done to me." Mary **chose** inner peace as she embraced that God would make the impossible possible, and she celebrated how God would bring gold out of the mud!

Dr. Brené Brown, author of several amazing books centering on the theme of **wholehearted living**, speaks poignantly of practices which develop inner peace. The first two of those practices are: Cultivating authenticity and cultivating self-compassion. Cultivating authenticity requires letting go of determining our value based on what others think of us. Cultivating self-compassion requires us to shed perfectionism – the fear of not measuring up. That equips us to minimize shame, blame, and judgment.

Remember, peace comes when we accept **what is**, and are able to use our energy to live into the **what's next**. Our world today, has become known by the mud that is slung in all directions. Our current circumstance **seems to be** shaped increasingly by the human condition that puts others down, in order to artificially lift up the one with the demeaning rhetoric. Yet, we hope, we believe, we know...that there is gold waiting to be uncovered, and offered as a cherished gift to pay homage to the holy child of God.

So, instead of waiting for things to be more peaceful, how can we be the ones to offer more peace?

Mary was following a long line of folks with emerging faith in responding affirmatively to God's call (with or without an angel!). Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah, just to name a few. Will our names be added to the spiritual genealogy of those who have followed God's call to embrace the circumstance, and see gold when others only see mud? Will we find inner peace, wholehearted living, and reasons to rejoice as chaos becomes calling? Remember, with God, nothing is impossible.

Take a slow deep breath! Every time we inhale, we are invited to receive the Spirit of the Living God. The breath/Spirit within us connects the divine with the human **in** life-enhancing ways. Every time we exhale, we are encouraged to offer a witness to others about how Christ transforms our lives. Receive, embody, and share the peace of Christ this day. Breathe! Peace! Breathe! Peace!

Holy Living God, Blessed Jesus, Guiding Spirit,
alight within us your flame of peace this day.

Grant us openness to hear your message.

Grant us courage to be your messengers in the world,
creating more peace even in the midst of fear. **Amen.**ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱJames Moore, "Won't You Let Him In?" An Advent Study For Adults, page 30.

ⁱⁱBishop Kenneth Carter, "Call and Response" sermon for Advent 4B, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱDr. Marcia McFee, "Angels Among Us," Worship Design Studio, 2017.